

MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church & Society REPORT

Report 19

April-May, 1978

FOCUS ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Mennonites have been slower than many of the main-line North American denominations in accepting women into the ordained ministry. And where our conferences have been ready to ordain women, many congregations have not been ready to call a woman pastor to serve them. At the same time, our Anabaptist tradition, which testifies that there are no special sacred persons (Conrad Grebel and his friends wrote that during the Lord's Supper "a server from out of the congregation" should pronounce the words, and the bread and wine should be given to all, not limited to one specially consecrated person as in the Catholic services), has provided a theoretical, if not always implemented, model priesthood of all believers. Caught between this ideal and the reality that men seem to be more sacred than women, as well as between varying interpretations of the Scriptures on the role of women in the church, some of us have come to believe that all Christian disciples are ministers of the forgiving love of Christ might contribute to interpreting the word of God, and might lead communion, whether they "minister" vocationally as pastors, teachers, social or medical workers, musicians, etc. All are ordained by God.

Since choosing the role of pastor in a congregation has not been an option for Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women until recently, some women with leadership gifts and interest in the church channeled their energies into such pastoral functions as teaching, spiritual counseling and organizing, without official ordination and often as volunteers, within congregations, in mission work overseas or in other social or church institutions. Although many such women received most of their education in local congregations, or in church-related colleges, women were not absent from the Mennonite seminaries. In the following article Nancy Swartzentruber Lapp, Task Force member who helped collect materials for this issue, shares some of the information she has compiled about women graduates of Mennonite seminaries. The Task Force is interested in further information on Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women who have had seminary training (we'd like to work on an article for the church papers) and would appreciate your help. Please write Nancy if 1) you have questions growing out of the article you'd like to see explored, 2) you are a Mennonite or Brethren in Christ woman who has graduated from an other than Mennonite seminary (we'd like to know you exist) and 3) you have human interest stories related to the article to share.

Women who have chosen to or are considering working as full-time pastors in local congregations have particular problems. One is lack of women role models (it does not occur to many women to consider the pastorate; those who do must break new

ground) and a second is finding a style of leadership consistent with the human values Christian feminists have tried to emphasize. Women and men concerned about women in the ministry arranged two inter-Mennonite conferences, one in 1976, the other in 1977, to share experiences and organize for support and action. A third conference is being planned for later this year.

In this issue, as a glimpse into their lives, Flo Richer, part of a pastoral team in Denver, Colorado, and Melanie May, a seminary student in Boston considering ministry in the Church of the Brethren (a sister group which has recognized women as pastors more extensively than we have) share something of what it means to be a woman in congregational leadership today.

--ggk

OUT OF THE WOODWORK: WOMEN SEMINARY GRADUATES

The Task Force on Women has been interested in knowing how many women have graduated from our Mennonite seminaries, what kinds of degrees they have earned and in what ways they presently minister to and serve the church. I have tried to collect this information by writing to the seminaries (Eastern Mennonite at Harrisonburg, VA; Mennonite Brethren Biblical at Fresno, CA; and the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries at Elkhart, IN, and also by sending a questionnaire to the women graduate themselves. There were many questions I did not ask that would be interesting and helpful, but this is at least a beginning in learning about women in ministry in the Mennonite church.

Mennonite Biblical Seminary at Fresno has 13 women graduates (1 in theology in 1977) with 10 women enrolled in classes in the fall of 1977.

Eastern Mennonite Seminary at Harrisonburg has 4 women graduates (two with theology degrees) with 9 enrolled as students in the fall of 1977.

Goshen Seminary at Elkhart has 21 women graduates (9 with theology degrees) with 7 full-time and 21 part-time women students in the fall of 1977. Goshen was the first Mennonite seminary to convey a degree to a woman. Harriet Lapp Burkholder earned the Th.B. degree in 1938.

Mennonite Biblical Seminary at Elkhart has 34 women graduates (4 with theology degrees) and has 8 full-time and 11 part-time students in the fall of 1977.

This makes a total of 72 women who have received degrees from the seminaries. Sixteen of the degrees were in theology; most of the rest of the women earned degrees in Christian education. Thirty-two of the degrees were given in the 1970's.

The following information is incomplete, due to the fact that some of the questionnaires were not returned and the Fresno graduates did not receive them. A few of the graduates are employed by agencies not affiliated with the church (teaching, nursing, etc.). At least 12 graduates serve overseas in at least 10 countries. At least 13 graduates are employed full-time by churches or church-related agencies (seminary, college, high school, hospital, conference or congregation). At least 10 are employed part-time in similar ways. At least six graduates have been ordained--three in the General Conference Mennonite Church, one in the Mennonite Church, one in the Presbyterian and one in the Methodist Church. Many of these women serve the church on a volunteer basis and make a significant and meaningful contribution in this way.

In the past, and currently, many women (including some of these seminary graduates) have served the church in a pastoral capacity as "pastors' wives". They serve in many ways as a pastor does, with the exception of preaching (though some are frequently speakers in church activities, particularly in women's meetings). They have generally been seen as helpers to the pastor but not as pastors, and their service and ministry has been as volunteers.

The spring 1978 meeting of the Task Force on Women in Church and Society will be held on May 26, 1978, at MCC headquarters in Akron, PA. For more information, write to MCC Peace Section, Akron, PA, 17501.

The above pattern continues to be used in the Mennonite Brethren Church and there is little openness to having women use their pastoral gifts in a more complete way.

There has been some change in the Mennonite Church in this regard. There are at least two women who are presently serving as part of a pastoral husband-wife team with a shared salary. One of them is ordained and both of them participate in the preaching ministry. At the present there are no women in the Mennonite Church serving in a pastoral capacity without functioning in a situation with their husband.

The General Conference Mennonite Church has made significant changes in the 1970's in their use of women's gifts in the pastoral ministry. There are currently at least two women serving as pastors in a husband-wife team and at least three who are full-time pastors in a situation where the other member of the team is not their husband; two of these women are single and one is married.

As far as I know there are no women serving as full-time pastors of Mennonite or Brethren in Christ congregations without being a member of a man-woman team.

In doing this study, I have been encouraged by seeing the progress that has been made in the 1970's in the use of leadership and pastoral gifts of women in the Mennonite church.

Women are also beginning to serve the church in other leadership ways, such as serving on churchwide boards and committees, serving as members of conference executive committees, as chairpersons of congregations, church administrators, elders and deacons.

I am sure that for some women in some situations, it seems like change is a long way off, but change is beginning to happen, and the church will be richer and more blessed in using more fully the gifts of all its members.

--Nancy Schwartzentruber Lapp, 3220 S. Shore Drive, Albany, OR, 97321

GARDENERS OF THE SPIRIT: TEAM MINISTRY IN DENVER FOR THE FIRST MENNONITE CONGREGATION OF DENVER, COLORADO

As a pastoral team member for the past year-and-a-half, I am aware of two equally strong sensations: The dawning of a new day with emerging gifts, and the actualization of resources of former days which I brought to my present assignment. The former could be compared to shedding one's cocoon; the latter to realizing that the gifts were there all along, only awaiting for the potentializing now.

My present ministry consists of the following as time and energy allows: leading worship services, preaching, facilitating MYF Christian Education classes, directing drama in worship, teaching an inquirer's class on the meaning of Mennonite understandings of faith, church life and belief, co-leading a marriage enrichment series for congregational couples, counseling (spiritual marriage and family, personal growth), teaching a prayer-therapy group, hospital and special occasion visitation, serving ex-officio on the church board, worship commission and Adult Christian Education Committee. The expectations of both the congregation and my fellow pastoral team member (who is my husband) include a variety of pastoral care tasks which respects and gives dignity to the broad range of my abilities. For the moment, this feels so much better than being relegated and restricted to a particular specialty or two such as youth ministry, Christian Education direction, or counseling. This presupposes a congregational sensitivity to the variety and timing-discretion of the pastoral team in their division of labor. For example, I feel free to attend or not attend a church board meeting, with one of us usually attending and sometimes both. The congregation has been understanding and supportive of the time I am also giving toward my doctorate in marriage and family therapy as well as to participation in Mennonite Student Services.

I am finding that two priorities need continual assessment and modification:

preservation of time for personal growth and space, and creation of family enrichment-sharing time. These priorities I guard religiously, or else my total effectiveness dissipates like a wilting flower.

While generalizations are often risky, nevertheless I feel that a woman has stronger intuitive gifts and insights which are highly useful in pastoral settings. It is also intriguing that many of the New Testament pastoral leadership qualities could be evaluated as more "feminine" than "masculine" from a popular, Western cultural perspective. However, this can trap us into falling into the "comparative game" which often results in little enlightenment and wasted energy.

"Choice" experiences are jointly (with my husband) performing wedding services and occasional dialogue sermons.

I'm discovering what it feels like to be much more relaxed and "at home" in the pulpit. My sense of confidence and self-esteem have risen measurably with repeated "practice." I'm learning to integrate through-the-week pastoral contacts with worship experience in terms of needs, questions, struggles and joys. I'm conscious of the need to provide a "smorgas-board" of types of experiential worship to meet the variety of persons present.

"New gifts" which have been called forth from me are preaching, functioning in committees, co-facilitating group process, and leading marriage enrichment workshops.

In many ways, I view pastoral opportunity in the words of Mary Sarton as recorded in her Journal of Solitude:

"Help us to be always hopeful
Gardeners of the Spirit
Who know that without darkness
Nothing comes to birth
As without light
Nothing Flowers."

—Flo Richer, Lakewood, Colorado

CALL TO MINISTRY: A BRETHREN PERSPECTIVE

It seems that one of the significant emergents from new awareness and a heightened consciousness among women today is the recognition that it is indeed important to share our stories, to reflect together on those persons and events which have shaped who we are and what we are about. Now, perhaps more than previously, the crucial contribution of role models for growth and development is to be noted. Therefore, as I reflect on my own sense of calling to and participation in the ministry of the church, I look to significant persons in attempting to understand my journeying.

Early in my growing years in the Church of the Brethren I did not know directly women who were pastoring congregations. Though there were women serving in that capacity, those with whom I was in contact were involved in other ways as leaders in the church, both locally and nationally. My mother was the first woman to serve our local congregation as moderator of the church. In that role she was responsible for congregational life and for working closely with the pastor in his role. Later, when I was in high school, she served our district in that same capacity of moderator. The other most significant figure during these years was Anna Mow, former missionary, seminary professor, and at that time a much esteemed speaker and spiritual leader for the church.

It was not until I went to college, however, that I seriously considered my own calling to ministry. Though in high school I had been quite active locally, in the district, and nationally, in youth leadership, I did not think of myself in the role of minister or pastor. During my first fall at Manchester College I met Phyllis Carter, pastor of the Church of the Brethren in Wabash, Indiana. In conversation with her and others on campus I found myself more and more open to that calling. When I returned home over Christmas a close family friend and church leader confronted me with a call to be licensed to the ministry of the Church of the Brethren.

The process for becoming a minister in the Church of the Brethren involves two steps. The licensed ministry is a time of searching, of study, of preparation, as well as active participation in the ministry of the church. Following a call from my local congregation, I was interviewed by a district ministry committee, and then on their recommendation was licensed by my congregation. Each year I meet with that district committee to review and evaluate my involvements and intentions concerning ministry. As a licensed minister I am expected to actively prepare myself for work in the church through study, and I may also serve as a minister with supervision by an ordained minister. Since being licensed, I have been called on to preach frequently, both in my local congregation, in the district and in other areas as well.

During the last summer I served as a summer pastor of a church in Virginia. In this role I carried out almost all the functions of pastoral ministry as they presented themselves in the ongoing life of the congregation. I preached, led worship, taught a Bible study, led a youth group, visited in the hospital and with shut-ins, assisted in communion and a funeral. I was accepted as a woman in a pastoral position with nothing but enthusiasm and cooperation. In this supportive fellowship I began to perceive a unique perspective and contribution which women can bring to ministry. It seemed to me that members of the congregation, especially many of the women, turned to me as a spiritual leader, as someone to trust and in whom they could confide. Several of the women commented that it was the first time they had really felt able to be open to and close with a minister. These and other experiences have led also to reflect on the strength of team ministries as well.

Following a period of licensed ministry, usually at the completion of formal study, the church issues a call to the ordained ministry of the church. Though this call has been extended to me, I have not felt ready to accept it, not because of negative experiences, but because of certain questions

I have yet to resolve about the meaning of ordination. I am uneasy with the tendency toward professionalism in the role of the minister which I sense in the Church of the Brethren. Rather than conceiving myself as the professional minister, the one designated to do the work of the church, I am most attracted to the role of the minister as an enabler, a facilitator, for the ministry of all those participating in the life of the congregation. I do believe it is valuable to have training, to study, to prepare for ministry; however, I resist expectations that by virtue of those skills the ordained minister should perform the work of the church. Perhaps my perceptions of the ordained ministry are reflective of another model of leadership which embodies notions of cooperation and shared responsibility rather than more traditional hierarchical models.

My exploration and journeying in response to the call to ministry in the church continues. Not only am I considering pastoral models, but am also preparing for teaching ministry and imagining new models for education within the church. As women increasingly become participants in the ministry of the church it seems that such creativity ought to be part of our unique offering.

--Melanie May, Linville Creek Church of the Brethren, Broadway, Virginia

LETTERS

Dear Gayle:

Having so recently been involved with General Conference Women in Mission, I read your last Task Force Report dealing with women's organizations with more than casual interest. I'd like to offer some response to your suggestion that separate groups should be "self-consciously temporary."

There was a time just a few years ago when I would have agreed with you that one should work toward the phasing out of separate women's groups, but I have modified my thinking on that point.

In my years with Women in Mission, it was my privilege to meet and to work with so many fine persons who are making solid contributions to the church community through their organization that I can't feel we'd be better off at this time without women's organizations. Of course, if I had my "druthers", I'd druther the church would realize right now that the same skills which are effective in our organizations could be equally effective at all levels of church responsibility; I do agree fully with Beulah Kauffman, however, that all of us need to do more maturing and growing.

In our General Conference, Women in Mission has undergirded and promoted the struggles of all women to become more involved in the church, and much remains to be done.

As a very practical point, there is added strength an organization can bring to bear as compared with individual striving, and I just don't think we ought to give that up. Besides, there is something disturbing to me in having women advocate the demise of an organization for other women. If we believe a person should be free to choose her area of involvement, then she should also be free to join or not to join a woman's organization; when you eliminate the organization you eliminate one choice, in particular for those who find "their most meaningful space" within its ranks. I do agree with you that one should hold it gently, not clutch it tightly to insist on its permanence.

There may very well come a day when women's groups are no longer viable contributors to church life, but although I believe wholeheartedly in the broader use of women's gifts, I cannot work for the elimination of Women in Mission.

To me the liberating imperative is to cultivate respect and love for one another and to reach out a hand, whether we work within women's organizations or with the larger church--or in both spheres, as many of us do.

In friendship,

Gladys Goering
Gladys Goering, Moundridge, KS

Dear Gayle,

Dr. Cornelia Butler Flora, a professor from Kansas State University who spoke at the General Conference Women and Development Conference in January, made a special point of stressing the importance of organizational networks for Third World women. She said she had emerged from a time when she thought women's organizations were to be despised to a new appreciation for the opportunities they afforded women to operate from a base of strength.

Do you think there are parallels between the Third World situation and ours? I noted in the World Conference, for instance, that the women's meeting was abolished, but nothing was put in its place to assure a say. I agree with your ultimate vision of togetherness.

Sincerely,

Herta Funk, Newton, KS

NEWS

Packets on women and development from the January 13-14 conference sponsored by the General Conference Commission on Education are available for \$3.00 from the General Conference Office, Box 347, Newton, KS, 67114. The folder includes a number of pamphlets and articles, three booklets ("Integration of Women in Development" from the U.N.; "Women and Development" and "Nutrition and Development" from Mennonite Central Committee) and a short study guide to use with the materials.

Infant formula malnutrition a threat. See March 1, 1978, Christian Century for article on how the move from breast to artificial feeding of infants (stimulated by Western formula manufacturers) affects Third World and poor American women and children.

We made it! The \$10,000 goal for the travel fund for Third World women to attend the Mennonite World Conference in Wichita at the end of July has been reached. The World

Conference has agreed to match this amount with an additional \$10,000. Additional money received will be used to cover expenses of hosting the women during their stay. A special thanks to everybody who helped pool resources.

Hispanic Mennonite Women met in Goshen in April. The Report will report later.

West Coast Mennonite Central Committee is planning to sponsor a weekend study conference in the Northwest on "A Biblical Understanding of Women in Church and Society, November 24-26, 1978, with Herta Funk and Harold Bauman as resource persons.

Single women and couples interested in serving as team ministers met for a one-day seminar with Jacob Friesen, responsible for overall General Conference ministerial placement, and pastor Anne Neufeld Rupp, April 9 at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana. The meeting was arranged so that prospective team ministers might meet people already working in such pastoral situations and discuss the special problems and needs team ministry involves.

A slide set, "Women in Developing Countries: An Attempt at Understanding," is available from the Audio Visual Library, Box 347 Newton, KS 67114 for a \$3.00 rental.

The following article was taken from
Congressional Record - Senate S 3533
March 13, 1978

WOMEN IN THE MILITARY WILL HELP RECRUITING CRUNCH

Mr. PROXMIRE. Mr. President, on Friday, I had printed in the RECORD a New York Times editorial which recommended that the Congress meet the wishes of the armed services and end legal restrictions on women in our military forces.

On Saturday, March 11, the Washington Post added its voice to the call for equal opportunity for women and for efficient use of our manpower—I should say person power; our manpower and womanpower. The Post points out that the Defense Department is having trouble recruiting well qualified males and that unless women can be assigned to a wider range of military jobs, according to the Defense Department, slots in combat units will have to remain unfilled or filled with less-qualified men.

Mr. President, if we believe in any kind of equal economic opportunity for women, the biggest employer in the country is the Armed Forces. They employ over 2 million people. The Armed Forces provide excellent opportunities

these days. Women are being turned away, qualified women. Women who are accepted, there is no question that the record shows, have a better record of intelligence, a better record of education, and less turnover. They improve the quality of the Armed Forces in all kinds of ways.

For 95 percent of the work done in the Armed Forces can be done easily as well by women as by men, but because they are barred from so-called combat zones, they cannot have the promotions and achieve the rank they deserve and ought to have.

Mr. President, I commend this excellent editorial to the attention of my colleagues and ask unanimous consent that it be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the editorial was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

WOMEN IN COMBAT

More often than not, debates over the Equal Rights Amendment have bogged down over the question of whether its ratification would force the Pentagon to use women in combat. The Defense Department has now made a move—on grounds that have nothing to do with women's rights—that would pull the rug out from under that argument. It has asked Congress to lift the bars against the assignment of women to combat-related jobs and to ships at sea, replacing them with a law permitting the secretary of each armed service to decide where women should serve.

The problem the Defense Department is trying to solve is quite simple. It is having trouble recruiting enough well-qualified males to fill all the jobs in combat units, and it has a surplus of well-qualified female volunteers. Unless women can be assigned to a much broader range of military jobs, the department says, it will be forced either to leave slots in combat units unfilled or to fill them with less-qualified men. That is a powerful argument. It says, in effect, that we can have a first-rate military force if women are used to their full capabilities and a second-rate one if they aren't.

Much of the emotion that this issue has stirred in recent years arises out of an old-fashioned notion of what "combat" is. Every time it is discussed, the picture is drawn of women in foxholes or trenches, struggling with mortars and other heavy equipment. Many women—and some men—are physically unfit for such jobs, and we doubt that any secretary of the army would ever assign them there. But sitting in a missile silo or flying a bomber or operating a piece of navigational equipment can be just as much a part of combat. We, at least, would rather have a well-qualified woman in a critical combat job than an unqualified man.

In addition to this need of the armed services to upgrade their personnel is the need of women who choose to make a career out of the military service to have access to those jobs. They are, in many instances, the key to career advancement. If the armed forces are to have a female component—and the nation decided decades ago that they should have—the jobs necessary to advancement must be open to the women who help compose them. Otherwise, the quality of female volunteers will diminish over time, and then the squeeze for well-qualified personnel will really be on. It is a happy coincidence that the Pentagon has realized its own practical need to open the jobs available to women at the same time the women in the military are seeking those jobs for a quite different reason. Congress ought to change the law as the Defense Department has requested—and without the slightest hesitation.

SPECIAL BANQUET FOR WOMEN AT WORLD CONFERENCE

International women will be hosted at a special banquet to welcome them to the Mennonite World Conference.

Women in North America are organizing the Wednesday evening, July 26 buffet for 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. Talks, and consequently translation, will be kept to a minimum. Social interaction is the main purpose of the event.

There will be space for 425 persons. Although advance bookings will not be taken, women will be able to sign up for the banquet when they receive their registration materials at the beginning of MWC, July 25. North American women are encouraged to bring international guests to the occasion. The cost is \$4.25 per person.

On Thursday, during the noon break from 12:30 to 2:30, two informal discussion groups for women will meet. The Mennonite Central Committee Task Force on Women is planning topics for discussion. Again, the purpose is mainly to bring about a meeting of people.

VERBS . . . PEOPLE IN ACTION

Gladys Goering, Moundridge, KS, is one of three General Conference representatives on the new World Conference Council.

Sally Dyck, Ritzville, WA, is graduating from the Boston University School of Theology this spring. She plans to be ordained in the Methodist Church.

Lois Bergen is coordinating the youth program at the World Conference in Wichita.

Gayle Gerber Koontz was elected lay pastor of the Boston Mennonite congregation for one year.

Graduate students Glenda Yoder and Gayle Gerber Koontz joined a young group of east coast feminist social ethicists in Boston in March.

WE NEED YOUR EARS! What's happening out there? The mail has been sparse as is evident by the conspicuous fact that the editor put herself in twice.

The Report is a bi-monthly publication of the MCC Peace Section Task Force on Women in Church And Society. Correspondence should be sent to Gayle Gerber Koontz, 27 Fairlawn St., Everett, MA 02149.

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